

**Testimony of Simon Wells, Program Director, Horizons
Programs, Inc., South Windham, Connecticut
to the Appropriations Committee
H.B. No. 6824 “AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET
FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND
MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER
PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE,” Specific to the DDS
Budget
March 6, 2015**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Simon Wells, I have worked in the field of developmental disabilities for over twenty five years; and I am the Director of Supported Employment and Options at Horizons, a private nonprofit agency located in South Windham. Our agency has been in operation for 36 years and provides individualized supports and services for people with special needs where they live, learn, work, and play. Horizons is a member of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits.

I speak before you in opposition to H.B. No. 6824 “AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE,” specific to the DDS budget.

Over the next two years the Governor proposes cuts specific to the DDS budget for Employment and Day Services programs by \$30 million, Residential Services by \$23 million, and new high school graduates programs by \$36 million; also, previous cuts are annualized – costing private providers \$21 million over those same two years.

Our agency has suffered many budgetary cuts, through changes to DDS/POS contracts. We remain resourceful, creative & effective in continuing to deliver on our guiding principles despite these fiscal burdens. There has been a gradual decline in funding and we find ourselves worse off fiscally today than 5 years ago. Most POS rates we are paid have been reduced. The 1% COLA provided around 3 years ago was ultimately consumed by larger, significant rate cuts. Our staff wages remain flat and it has become increasingly more difficult to attract and keep good qualified employees due to the relatively low wages we can provide. This creates a revolving door of staff turnover and unnecessary costs related to continual hiring & training. Our services are built on relationships, to make the biggest impact we need to be able to keep a stable staff team.

Governor Malloy addressed on the public radio show, ‘Where we live’ on 3/4/15 why a small section of government employees are earmarked to receive a pay increase in this

budget. He argued that their wages had been flat for years when other state employees had received increases. He said it was necessary to be able to keep well qualified staff. By the same argument why are non-profits not fairly compensated for the work they do compared with the public sector? Same work, different pay. This disparity is discriminatory.

The proposed budget cuts for FY 2016 & 2017 will cause considerable harm and hardship to agencies such as ours. Agencies have been scrambling to cope with cuts already imposed but it seems evident that the scales have tipped. Late last year, REM (a for profit provider) left the state citing it could no longer afford to do business in Connecticut. Countless other agencies are going under, or taking other drastic measures to stay afloat; refusing certain services, releasing more experienced (and higher paid) staff and hiring less qualified employees to cope.

The net result is a degrading of services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

As a tax payer I want to move towards a balanced budget but it cannot be accomplished by targeting the neediest. Hard working non-profits need to be preserved not penalized. Fund DDS and non-profits so they can maintain services. We should be rewarded and valued not punished.

Our positive, individualized, capacity based approach has helped dreams be realized, helped integrate individuals with developmental disabilities in their local communities and ensure individuals maintain their health and safety. This is the right thing to do; it saves money, creates jobs and contributes to the tax base in Connecticut.

Respectfully, Simon Wells